

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 188 396

EC 124 356

AUTHOR Vasa, Stanley F.: And Others
TITLE Career Education for the Handicapped Parents' Changing Roles and Responsibilities.
PUB DATE Apr 80
NOTE 15p.; Paper presented at the Annual International Convention of The Council for Exceptional Children, 58th, Philadelphia, PA, April, 1980, Session W-29).
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Career Education; *Disabilities; Elementary Secondary Education; Parent Attitudes; *Parent Participation; *Parent Responsibility; *Parent Role; Parent School Relationship; *Teacher Characteristics

ABSTRACT

The importance of parent involvement in the career education of their handicapped children is the focus of the paper. Parent participation is necessary both because it has been mandated by law and because parents have an influence on their children and provide a valuable resource in career education. Alternative delivery systems, such as newsletters and teacher home visitations should be considered. Parents may be reluctant to become involved due to negative previous experiences with schools and school personnel or because they have found it difficult to articulate their concerns. Teachers need to display interest, acceptance, and empathy as well as honesty, objectivity, and dependability. Effective interaction needs to be established through such techniques as careful planning of conferences, and teachers must be prepared to recruit parent involvement and establish an ongoing communication system with parents. (PHF)

* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *

ED188396

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

**Career Education for the Handicapped
Parents' Changing Roles
and Responsibilities**

Presented by

Stanley F. Vasa, Ed.D.
Associate Professor
Department of Spec. Educ.
University of Nebraska-Lincoln
204B Barkley Center
Lincoln, NE 68583

Allen Steckelberg, M.A.
Coordinator
Project for Parent Education
University of Nebraska-Lincoln
204L Barkley Center
Lincoln, NE 68583

Gary D. Meers, Ed.D.
Director, Special Vocational
Needs Program
Center for Vocational Education
University of Nebraska-Lincoln
300 W Nebraska Hall
Lincoln, NE 68588

at the
International Council for Exceptional
Children Convention

Philadelphia, PA
April 23, 1980

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS
MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Stanley F.
Vasa

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

EC 124356

GETTING PARENTS INVOLVED IN CAREER EDUCATION FOR THE HANDICAPPED STUDENT

One current definition of career education which recognizes the important role played by parents is provided by Feldman (1979):

The entire educational curriculum, coordinating all school, family, and community components together to develop each individual's potential for economic, social and personal success. (p. 1)

Parent involvement in career education is important for several reasons. Recent legislation and judicial decisions have mandated parent participation in handicapped children's education. These require certain procedures as a minimum interaction between parents and schools. Second, parents exert a marked influence on their child's career decisions (Aubrey, 1977). Third, parents provide a valuable resource to the educational process by serving as volunteers, guest speakers, and on advisory committees. In addition, they play a valuable role in delineating realistic goals and expectations for their children. Fourth, parent involvement is good basic public relations. A positive relationship between the school and parents helps alleviate the knowledge gap in the community about school programs.

Some of the issues pertinent to involving parents in school programs include: alternative delivery systems; understanding reasons for parent noninvolvement; encouraging parent involvement; and teacher education's responsibility. In the following discussions, each of these issues will be addressed.

Alternative Delivery Systems

There are numerous approaches to getting parents involved in career education of their children. Many of the approaches have been used successfully in the past to inform parents of school policies and procedures but have remained a virtually untapped resource in actually involving parents in the educational process. Several of the most common approaches are outlined below:

1. Telephone Contacts
2. Written Communications
3. Newsletters
4. Parent-teacher Conferences
5. Parent School Visitations
6. Teacher Home Visitations
7. Surveys of Parents and their Informational Needs
8. Parent Groups
9. Parent-to-Parent Groups
10. Parent Volunteers in the Classroom
11. Training Parents to Teach their Own Children
12. Providing Parenting Skill Training
13. Utilizing Parents as Classroom Resources
14. Individual Education Program (IEP) Conference

The choice of method is dependent upon several factors including the educator's personality, skills in communicating with parents, willingness to try new and perhaps different approaches, and resources.

The most important factor to consider when choosing a method is the purpose of the communication. Some purposes, such as informing the parents of career related events at school, are more efficiently conveyed through newsletters or other written communication. Information about school programs may be most effectively communicated through parent-teacher conferences, parent group meetings, or parent school

visitations. Reporting a student's progress to parents is probably not done very effectively through a telephone contact but may be included in a written communication, parent-teacher conference or an IEP conference. In summary, the teacher must carefully weigh the potential outcomes of the various approaches against the cost in time and resources.

Parent Noninvolvement

In discussions with teachers about parent involvement a common concern often has been expressed. Teachers relate that parents are not interested or are reluctant to become involved in school programs, parent-teacher conferences, IEP staffings, and other attempts by the school to achieve parent participation. It is our belief that although at times it may be perceived as such, this is rarely the result of a don't care attitude on the part of the parents (Vasa & Steckelberg, 1979). It is more likely that a negative reaction to schools and resulting lack of involvement is due to a combination of other factors based on parents' emotional reactions and past experiences with schools and school personnel.

Parent Adjustment to Their Handicapped Child. Consider the emotional reactions of parents and how these may contribute to parent school interaction. Love (1970) has suggested that parents' reactions to having a handicapped child may follow a typical pattern, including such reactions as shock, denial, guilt, bitterness, envy, rejection,

and adjustment. In Figure 1 a brief explanation of each of the adjustment stages is provided.

Figure 1 about here

It is not difficult to understand why parents who are having these or similar emotional reactions are reluctant to take part in school activities. Parents, who are in a state of shock after finding out their child is handicapped, are not likely to become immediately actively involved. Parents may deny that their child is handicapped or that they have a problem. They may also resent the school for identifying their child as handicapped and question the ability to provide adequate help for their child.

Chinn (1979) provides a similar series of possible reactions of parents which, although differing somewhat from Love's statements, are also detrimental to active parent involvement:

1. Defense mechanism
2. Projection of blame
3. Peers
4. Guilt
5. Withdrawal
6. Acceptance

Past Experiences. Parents' reluctance to become involved in their child's education may also result from their past experience with schools and school personnel. The following types of experiences often encountered to varying degrees by parents are illustrative of experiences

which tend to decrease the likelihood of involvement.

- A minority of students leaving school do so with strong positive feelings about school and teachers. A large number are glad to be gone and have negative feelings about returning.
- Due to past school experiences teachers may be seen as judgmental authority figures.
- Schools may represent the place parents go to hear about their child's failures and shortcomings.
- Suggestions in the past may have been unrealistic or unworkable.
- Promises may have been made and broken.
- Professionals have referred the parents to an endless number of other professionals who have referred them to more professionals.
- School personnel may have misinterpreted parents' motives in seeking answers to questions about their child's educational program. This questioning may have been perceived as a personal attack on the individual teacher.
- Parents may have found it difficult in the past to articulate their concerns adequately to the teachers.
- Teachers may have conveyed the impression that they know more about the child than the parents do.

These experiences among the possibility of many others may leave parents apprehensive, frustrated, angry, and convinced that the school isn't going to do much anyway, or that what the parents think will not be considered in making decisions. The end result may be that parents perceive schools much the same way that most of us perceive all government institutions, massive and unresponsive to their needs.

Encouraging Parent Involvement

Teacher Characteristics. Parents are encouraged to become more actively involved if their experiences with the school are positive and productive. The chance that the parent views the interaction with the school as a positive experience is greatly influenced by the characteristics of the teacher with whom they work. The following characteristics tend to increase the likelihood that parent involvement will continue to occur:

Interest. When parent perceives the teacher as willing to give time and attend to their concerns.

Acceptance. When by words, gestures, and body language the teacher demonstrates that they respect what the parent is saying and is not assuming a judgmental role.

Empathy. When the teacher demonstrates an ability to understand the role of the parent and its associated meanings.

Rapport. When a condition of comfort exists between the parents and the teacher allowing the parents to feel free to express themselves without fear of criticism or repercussions.

Honesty. When information provided by the teacher whether positive or negative is as accurate and realistic as possible.

Effective Listening When the teacher truly listens to what the parent is saying and can interpret it correctly.

Objective. When teachers discuss students in terms of behaviors rather than in emotionally laden generalities.

Ethical When parents perceive that the teacher will treat information shared as confidential and uses such information only for the direct benefit of the child.

Knowledgeable. When teachers demonstrate knowledge of programs for instruction, available resources, and agencies, as well as being familiar with the individual students strengths and weaknesses.

Dependability/Responsibility. When the teacher demonstrates a willingness to keep commitments and to follow through on proposed actions.

Organization. When the teacher demonstrates the ability to state objectives for meetings, make planful decisions, has necessary materials, and information in advance.

Establishing Effective Interaction

There are specific strategies which educators can employ to establish effective interactions with parents of handicapped students. Parent communication through conferences is the most commonly utilized strategy of obtaining information from and transmitting information. In Figure 2 is a list of guidelines for the educator to follow in conferencing with parents.

Figure 2 about here

In preparing for formal and informal parent contacts, educators need to be aware of parents' needs, values and perceptions. Parent interaction can be made more positive by remembering a few basic precepts. In Figure 3 some basic concepts to remember when working with parents are presented.

Figure 3 about here

Parent involvement is essential in achieving maximum success in career-education programs. The active involvement of parents of handicapped students is dependent upon individual teachers and schools' willingness and ability to devote the time and energy necessary to assure a positive relationship.

Teacher Education's Responsibility

Teacher Education has as its base, the preparation of individuals to be teachers of children. The teacher is to coordinate the activities that will enable students to learn. The above statement, in all of its simplicity, places a very large responsibility on the shoulders of teacher education. This responsibility is to make sure that students acquire the competencies necessary to carry out their assigned teaching responsibilities.

One of the reemerging needs in teacher education is to train teachers to involve parents in the educational process. A review of the history of education in America will reveal that parents were active in the educational process during the late 1800's and early 1900's and then this involvement started to disappear. In recent years many attempts have been made to reinvolve the parents to the maximum extent possible.

For parents of handicapped students, the need for involvement is even more important due to the need that the student has for longitudinal services. Special teacher education needs to prepare teachers to:

1. Recruit parental involvement. This involves approaching parents through personal contact, mail, phone, etc.
2. Share information with parents. This area involves presentation of information to parents, kind of shared information, mode of shared information, etc.
3. Establish relationship with parents. The teacher needs to establish a position relationship with the parents with a common bond of concern for the welfare of the student.
4. Seek assistance from parents. The parents need to understand how they can assist in the education of their son or daughter.
5. Establish an ongoing communication system with parents. This system can serve to feed information between the school and home and vice versa through the teacher's involvement with the student.

Figure 1

Parents' Emotional Reactions to Their Child's Handicapping Condition

<u>Emotional Reaction</u>	<u>Explanation</u>
Shock	Disbelief, inability to comprehend the problem, and emotional orientation and immobility. Takes time for parent to accept and comprehend negative information about their child.
Denial/Disbelief	Specific statements and feelings about the accuracy of the information. Questioning of the competence of the individual transmitting the information.
Guilt	Statements of what did I do to cause the problem. Were there things that I could have done to have prevented the problem? Emotion of seeking cause and understanding reason for condition.
Bitterness/Envy	Upset and concern about why did my child have the handicap. Unfairness of burden on me.
Rejection	Two types occur on the part of parents. Overt rejection is lack of involvement with the child and ignoring as much as possible his/her needs. Second, is the overt in which the parents overreacts on the surface to the needs of the child and may be overly solicitous. In both cases, the parent does not have positive feelings towards the child and his/her handicap.
Adjustment	Stage in which parents acknowledge the child's strengths and weakness and conscientiously seeks the proper assistance for the child.

Source: Love, H. D. Parental attitudes toward exceptional children.
Springfield, Ill.: Charles C. Thomas, Publishers, 1970.

Figure 2

Parent Conference Guidelines for Educators

EDUCATORS...

- ... should plan for all student conferences in advance.
- ... should have a clear purpose in mind for each conference, i.e. report student progress, etc.
- ... should inform parents of the purpose of the conference.
- ... should have all student records available for review prior to the conference.
- ... should consider the parent conference as an important event and not merely routine.
- ... should allow enough time to discuss the issues thoroughly. The parent should not feel rushed during the conference.
- ... should conduct the conference privately in a place free from distractions and interruptions.
- ... should have prior knowledge of the conference in order to brief himself/herself.
- ... should invite others to the conference only if they will contribute to resolving an issue or problem.
- ... should invite the student to attend, unless the conference covers subjects emotionally laden which might adversely affect the student.
- ... should hold the conference at a time convenient to the parent.
- ... should be aware of parent transportation needs and child care needs.
- ... should deal honestly with parents.
- ... should listen to the parent and respect their confidence.
- ... should avoid using educational jargon in conversing with the parent.
- ... should try to put themselves in the parent's role during the conference.
- ... should not jump to conclusions based on statements by parents.
- ... should back the school administration and other teachers during the conference.
- ... should be cautious of the content of written communications.
- ... should keep a record of the conference.
- ... should keep the parent informed of change following the conference.
- ... should establish a means of communication between the parent and teacher.
- ... should evaluate the effectiveness of the conference.
- ... should attempt to answer all questions raised by the parent.
- ... should realize that the responsibility for the success of the conference lies with the teacher.
- ... should not argue with the parent.
- ... should avoid giving direct advice to the parents on parenting.

Source: Vasa, S. F. & Steckelberg, A. L. Parent education: A vocational teacher's responsibility (chapter). In Meers, G. (Ed) Special vocational needs education in public schools. New York: Aspen Press, 1980.

Figure 3.

Considerations in Planning Parent Education Programs.

PARENTS...

- ... are individuals who have pride.
- ... have other interests and responsibilities besides their children and the school.
- ... have creative ideas and wealth of experience.
- ... have established child rearing philosophies.
- ... have a limited amount of free time for school programs.
- ... can assimilate a limited amount of information which is contrary to their individual philosophies and beliefs.
- ... are individuals who have developed behavior patterns consistent with their values, attitudes, and beliefs.
- ... have decisions to make and problems to solve.
- ... of the handicapped have developed a certain amount of resistance to suggestions from specialists and school personnel.
- ... are often bewildered and confused by all of the options available to them.
- ... have frustrations and concerns about the service previously rendered to their children.
- ... are suspicious of the school and its functions.
- ... are secretly afraid of failing in the rearing of their children.
- ... do not like to be talked down to or belittled for their failures.
- ... can CHANGE.

Source: Vasa, S. F. & Steckelberg, A. L. Parent education: A vocational teacher's responsibility (chapter). In Meers, G. (Ed) Special vocational needs education in public schools. New York: Aspen Press, 1980.

REFERENCES

Aubrey, R. Career development needs of thirteen-year-olds: How to improve career development programs. Washington, D.C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1977.

Chinn, P. C., Winn, J. & Walters, R. H. Two way talking with parents of special children: A process of positive communication. St. Louis: C. V. Mosby Company, 1978.

Edman, S. Readings in career and vocational education for the handicapped. Guilford, Connecticut: Special Learning Corporation, 1979.

Love, H. D. Parental attitudes toward exceptional children. Springfield, Ill.: Charles C. Thomas, Publishers, 1970.

Vasa, S. F. & Steckelberg, A. Career education, parents' role and the choices for the handicapped. Career development for exceptional individuals. In press, 1980.

Vasa, S. F. & Steckelberg, A. L. Parent education: A vocational teacher's responsibility (chapter). In Meers, G. (Ed) Special vocational needs education in public schools. New York: Aspen Press, 1980.